Republicans grill Obama science advisers on climate emails; scientists say warming legitimate

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Body

WASHINGTON - Republicans in the House of Representatives pointed to controversial emails leaked from climate scientists and said it was evidence of corruption. Top administration scientists looking at the same thing found no such sign, saying it does not change that the world is getting warmer.

The emails from a British university's climate centre were obtained by computer hackers and posted online about two weeks ago. Climate change skeptics contend the messages reveal that researchers manipulated and suppressed data and stifled dissent. Conservative bloggers are dubbing it "Climategate," a play on the Watergate scandal that ended the presidency of Richard Nixon.

In the first Capitol Hill airing of the issue, House Republicans read excerpts Wednesday from at least eight of the emails, saying they showed the world needs to re-examine experts' claims that the science on warming is settled. One email from 2003 was by John Holdren, then of Harvard University and now the president's science adviser.

The exploding controversy led Phil Jones to step aside as head of the climate research unit at the University of East Anglia in Britain, the source of the email exchanges. The university is investigating the matter. Penn State University in Pennsylvania also is looking into emails by its own researcher, Michael Mann. House Republicans asked for a separate hearing or investigation into the issue, but were rebuffed by Democrats.

"These emails show a pattern of suppression, manipulation and secrecy that was inspired by ideology, condescension and profit," said U.S. Rep. James Sensenbrenner.

The science is proper and this is about a small fraction of research on the issue, said Holdren, a physicist who has studied climate change.

"The emails do nothing to undermine the very strong scientific consensus ... that tells us the earth is warming, that warming is largely a result of human activity," said another government scientist, Jane Lubchenco. A marine biologist and climate researcher, she heads the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The emails do not negate or even deal with data from both NOAA and NASA, which keep independent climate records and show dramatic warming, Lubchenco told members of the House global warming committee.

The hearing was supposed to have focused on the latest in global warming scientific findings. Lubchenco even attempted a high school chemistry lesson with two quick experiments at the witness table. Donning one rubber glove, she demonstrated how adding carbon dioxide to water made it more acidic and said that is what is now

happening in the world's oceans. Then she put chalk in acidic water compounds and showed it dissolving a bit, to demonstrate what will happen eventually to vital sea life.

Her bubble-inducing experiments were ignored in favour of the more explosive emails.

Among the messages that Sensenbrenner read was one from Jones, the East Anglia scientist, in which he wrote about a "trick of adding in the real temps" in an exchange about long-term climate trends. Holdren responded that the word "trick" did not mean manipulation of data, but about a "clever way" to tackle a problem. Another Jones email read, "I would like to see the climate change happen so the science could be proved right."

Defending the scientists, Democratic Rep. Jay Inslee said somehow the emails are not stopping the Arctic from warming, the oceans from getting more acidic, and glaciers from melting. He sarcastically asked Holdren and Lubchenco if they were part of a global conspiracy that even included fictional movie villain organizations. Holdren played along, saying he was not.

After complaining of "scientific fascism" and "scientific McCarthyism," Sensenbrenner chastised Holdren for his 2003 email, when he was at Harvard University, which dealt with skeptics by "calling them names."

What the email, not read by Sensenbrenner, showed was that Holdren used ironic quotes around the word "Harvard" in describing two of his colleagues who are global warming skeptics. Holdren also had forwarded to other scientists an article he described as "for your entertainment" in which he was quoted as saying the two skeptics were "wrong." Holdren defended his email.

Sensenbrenner attacked the work of Penn State's Mann, whose name is brought up frequently in the communications. Mann is the author of what is called the "hockey stick" theory, first described in the late 1990s. It suggested that the past 50 years had been the hottest in several centuries, if not 1,000 years, and that manmade global warming was to blame. That research was so controversial that the National Academy of Sciences studied the work in depth; it was used in former Vice-President Al Gore's documentary on global warming.

Sensenbrenner said the 2006 National Academy study showed Mann's hockey stick was incorrect and that Mann's theory was discredited. But Holdren said the NAS study had quibbles with Mann's methods but agreed with his results.

The chairman of the Academy of Science panel, Texas A&M University atmospheric scientist Gerald North, confirmed in an interview Wednesday that Holdren was right, not Sensenbrenner.

"The conclusions that we came to were essentially the same as the hockey stick" theory that Mann proposed, North told The Associated Press. North said even if Jones, Mann and others had done no research at all, the world would still be warming and scientists would still be able to show it.

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On the Net:

House committee on global warming: http://globalwarming.house.gov/

Sensenbrenner's opening statement, which includes some email excerpts: http://tinyurl.com/gopwarm

2006 National Academy of Science study: http://tinyurl.com/nasmann

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